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ABSTRACT

The newsletter contains several separate sections which explore recent research on the information needs of the rehabilitation counselor or address issues counselors face when using supported employment with clients. An interview with Darlene Ackerman, a vocational rehabilitation counselor in Virginia, is include, in which she comments on barriers to support employment, communication concerns, counselor role, funding, and feedback. The next section reports on results of a national survey of rehabilitation counselors (N=790) on supported employment which includes narrative and tabular data on the rehabilitation counselor's role, counselors' knowledge of supported employment regulations, and counselors' training needs. Other sections of the newsletter review supported employment models (individual placements, enclaves, mobile work crew, and the small business/entrepreneurial model); monitoring and evaluating supported employment placements; emerging trends in supported employment (e.g., worker wages are below minimum for group models but are above minimum for individual placements); and advocacy for supported employment. Finally Paul Wehman of Virginia Commonwealth University answers commonly asked questions concerning supported employment (e.g., for whom should rehabilitation counselors use supported employment?). Six references. (DB)

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VOLUME 5, NUMBER 2

RRTC

"Improving the Employability of Citizens Who Are Mentally Retarded"

REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER AT VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

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Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors: Partners in Successful Supported Employment

The speed with which supported employment has grown from demonstration projects to widespread implementation has left even the most skilled vocational rehabilitation counselor wondering, how can I be most effective within the supported employment process?

> *"Supported employment is one of several effective strategies to assist individuals with severe disabilities to secure and maintain employment. It is a cost effective tool that can be individualized to meet the needs of the client with a disability and the community and should be fully integrated into the vocational rehabilitation system."*
>
> The Council of State Administrators in Vocational Rehabilitation, 1989

In practicing effective case management in supported employment, counselors might break down their role into the following areas: case service planning, monitoring and evaluating services, advocating for supported employment options, vocational and habilitation counseling, and serving as team leaders in the provision of services to the client. These categories are a generalization of the actual role that the counselor takes on in the supported employment process. In most instances a counselor, who is the key coordinator of services, must remain flexible to meet the needs of the client and the community.

Thus, perhaps the overall concern of a counselor in supported employment is that of advocacy. Central to this discussion of advocacy are the concepts of service coordination and individualization. Counselors not only have the responsibility for seeing that services are arranged for and carried out, but also have the authority to ensure that quality services are being provided. Ultimately, the client and the community will hold a counselor responsible for making sure the client receives the highest quality, least restrictive services in the shortest period of time.

Quality assurance and service coordination do not call for a total redefinition of the counselor's traditional views of case management or "brokering" of services.

If more work and better coordination and communication are involved in the implementation of supported employment, what are the benefits to the counselor? Through the use of supported employment, the counselor is able to serve those individuals with severe disabilities who might otherwise be unemployable. Contracting for supported employment through an approved vendor enables the counselor to spend much-needed time on counseling and case supervision. Supported employment provides avenues for increased assurances for a secure placement through systematic training, fading, and follow-along services.

As rehabilitation counselors become more knowledgeable about the practice of supported employment, the definition of the rehabilitation counselor's role in supported employment will become more refined. This newsletter explores recent research on the information needs of the rehabilitation counselor and begins to address the issues counselors face when using supported employment.

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Point of View

Rehabilitation counselors face a variety of new issues as they begin to implement supported employment. In a recent interview, Darlene Ackerman, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services, in Fredericksburg, Virginia, discussed barriers to the implementation of supported employment, the use of supported employment by the rehabilitation counselor, and the actual involvement of the counselor. Ms. Ackerman has been a rehabilitation counselor for 18 years and has a particular commitment to providing services to persons with severe disabilities.

Ackerman states that the lack of family support, no public transportation, and poor communication are the major barriers to the successful use of supported employment. "There are some people that are extremely unique and they are very difficult to find the right job for, but, overall we can find the jobs. However, if we don't have the family's support, because they are worried about social security benefits, whether or not the job is going to be full-time or part-time, or if there will be any insurance benefits, then supported employment may not work." She notes that the lack of public transportation is also a major obstacle. Ackerman added, "For some parents it is very convenient to let the vans from the sheltered workshop handle transportation to and from the workshop."

On the issue of communication, Ackerman says that you need to establish a general agreement with the provider. In her own case, she has a tendency to tell the provider up front what she feels the case needs, what she will pay for, and what services she expects the client to receive. If it doesn't work out as contracted, and the service provider needs a longer funding period, then they will have to discuss it with her. "I've been hearing from other counselors that they don't do this. This causes a major problem because the counselor has not communicated how involved they are going to get and when they are going to stop funding. Not only do you have to communicate, you have to understand each other. You have to basically like each other, and you have to trust each other," adds Ackerman.

Ackerman comments that supported employment has been used primarily with individuals with severe and profound mental retardation. However, she feels that persons with mental illness could benefit from supported employment services. "Supported employment seems to be working with this population. Of the three persons with chronic mental illness that I referred last year, two of the three are still working and doing very well. I have seen some real changes in their whole lives."

"For persons with cerebral palsy, and other severe physical disabilities," Ackerman adds, "supported employment would be perfect. The Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services is currently involved in a special project with severely physically disabled, and I can see that working."

Ackerman appears to like a great deal of involvement with her clients. "Supported employment in the beginning scared me because I didn't want to push my client off on someone else. I wanted to be involved." She notes that when a job coordinator finds someone a job, she wants to know about it. "I want to make sure that we all agree that it is the right job. And, I guess I am concerned about the future, one of the things I want to know if the job site is stable, if the position is going to last more than six months, and if the job match was the best possible choice taking into consideration benefits and salary?"

Asked about approving funding for the supported employment option, Ackerman comments, "The state has not set guidelines on the length of funding for supported employment. There are no maximums, but at 20% intervention level, a counselor should then consider ongoing support. This means that Vocational Rehabilitation stops and the long-term funding starts." However, Ackerman says, if the individual is not catching on after several months, then she might conclude that the placement was not right.

When asked how she evaluates the effectiveness of the vendor, Ackerman comments that feedback is the main area she looks at. "We have monthly staff meetings to discuss problems, referrals, and updates. If I don't get those monthly reports on time or they are not filled out properly, or if I don't get any feedback, I have concerns about the vendor.

Ackerman believes that the counselor has a vital and active role in the success of a supported employment placement. However, she stresses that cooperation and communication are the most critical elements in making this option work.

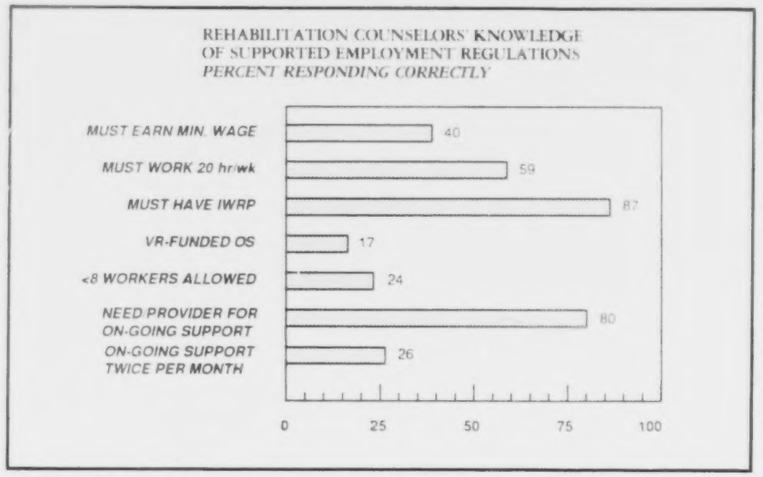
Point of View is a regular feature of the RRTC Newsletter.

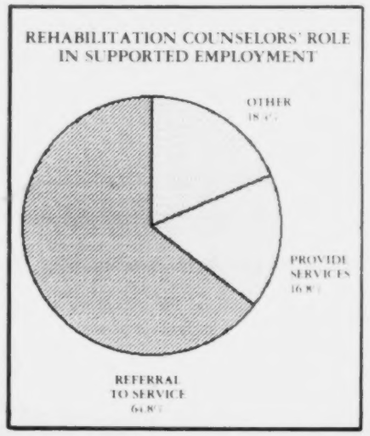
A National Survey of Rehabilitation Counselors on Supported Employment

In 1988, the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center at Virginia Commonwealth University, under the direction of Dr. Michael Shafer, conducted a national survey of state agency counselors. This survey evaluated public vocational rehabilitation counselors' knowledge, attitudes, use, and training needs regarding supported employment. The survey asked the following questions: (a) Are counselors using supported employment? (b) What is the role of rehabilitation counselors in supported employment? (c) Are counselors familiar with the new federal regulations governing supported employment? and (d) What aspects of supported employment do counselors want to learn more about?

Participants in the survey were counselors with caseloads who were employed by the state vocational rehabilitation agencies of 14 different states. The states for which these counselors worked were evenly distributed across the country and were drawn from each of the 10 geographic regions that the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) maintains. A total of 1,485 counselors received a survey questionnaire that consisted of 35 questions, and 790 counselors completed and returned the survey, representing a 53% response rate.

Approximately 299 (38%) of the counselors indicated they had used supported employment services for clients on their caseload. Considering that the survey was conducted less than one year after supported employment was authorized as a rehabilitation service by Public Law 99-607, this finding is encouraging. Clearly, many state agencies have worked diligently to develop and incorporate a supported employment within the case service system. Additionally, some counselors participating in this study were employed by state agencies that had received special Title 3 funding from RSA to develop supported employment. This special funding appears to have helped some states develop a supported employment system within their agency.





For those counselors who had used supported employment services, the RRTC was interested in determining to what extent they had used them. Counselors reported the proportion of their previous six-month caseload of clients that had received such services. Counselors' responses ranged from 90% of their caseload to 1%, and, in fact, 1% was the most frequently reported proportion, demonstrating the limited extent to which counselors are using supported employment.

To determine the role that rehabilitation counselors play in supported employment, counselors were asked if they referred clients to supported employment providers for service delivery, or if they provided the services themselves. As the accompanying pie chart on the *Rehabilitation Counselors' Role* suggests, service referral is the dominant method that counselors have used to access supported employment for their clients. These results clearly indicate that the role of the state agency rehabilitation counselor in supported employment is that of case management and service coordination, the same role in which counselors have traditionally functioned.

Counselors were also asked to respond to seven items on the questionnaire designed to assess the counselors' familiarity with the federal regulations regarding supported employment. These regulations specify how often ongoing support services have to be provided, how many workers can be employed at one business, and new issues that must be addressed in the Individualized Written Rehabilitation Program (IWRP). Counselors were asked to indicate if they understood statements about federal regulations. As the *Knowledge of Supported Employment Regulations* chart indicates, counselors were most familiar with the regulation requirements regarding the IWRP and least familiar with those aspects regarding ongoing supports and the number of clients allowed in a particular job site.

The final question in the study asked counselors to review a list of 11 topical areas related to supported employment and select those in which thay would like additional training andor information. As the chart on *Training Needs* indicates, counselors are most interested in learning more about their own role in the supported employment process and strate-

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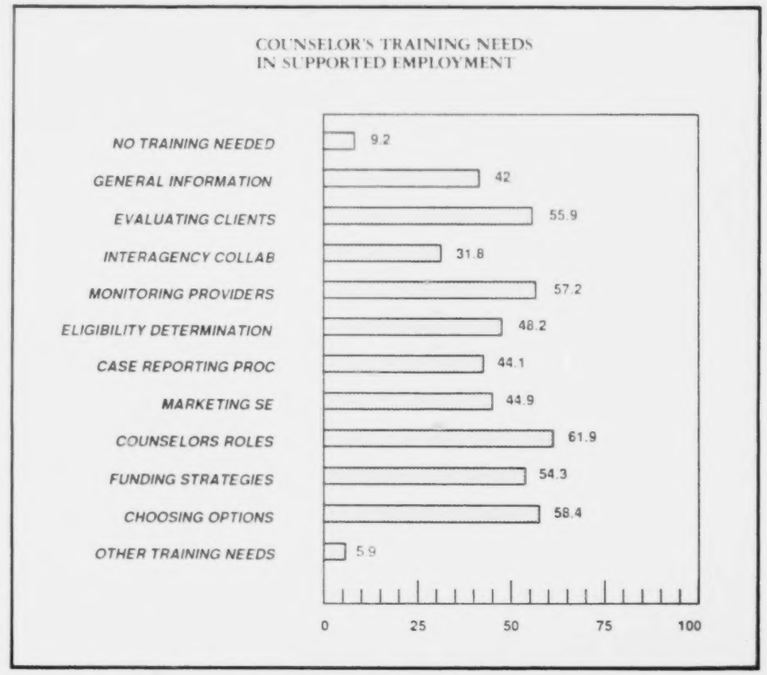


National Survey
(cont'd from previous page)

gies for choosing, monitoring, and evaluating supported employment services. Counselors were least interested in learning more about working with other agencies.

The results of this study reflect positively upon efforts that federal and state rehabilitation agencies have made in incorporating supported employment within their service structure. Counselors who participated in this study were eager to utilize supported employment options for clients on their caseloads. Repeatedly, counselors indicated that their state agency had not made supported employment available as a standard case service. Hence, it appears that future efforts are needed to help states develop and maintain an effective network of supported employment service providers and provide counselors with the authority and skills to access these services.

Counselors also need to learn more about supported employment, including issues such as integration and long-term supports. State vocational rehabilitation agencies, university-based rehabilitation counselor training programs, and professional rehabilitation organizations need to enhance counselors' understanding of these issues.

Finally, supported employment is available for only a small fraction of the total caseload population of state agency counselors, as suggested by the study. In future years, a tremendous growth could occur in the use of supported employment among state agency counselors that would benefit persons with severe disabilities.

Supported Employment Models

Most rehabilitation counselors are familiar with the four basic approaches to supported employment: the individual placement model, enclaves, mobile work crews, and the small business or entrepreneurial model. Since supported employment is individualized, programs in your area may not be identical to heavily researched and demonstrated models. The following brief description of each approach will assist you in advocating for the most appropriate model to serve your client. As you read each of the key characteristics, remember that localities can adjust each model to the needs of the clients and the community. Any configuration of these quality features can be used as long as Federal guidelines for supported employment are met. (See chart below.)

Individual Placements

The individual placement model uses an employment specialist (job coach), to assess, place, intensively train, and follow-along one client with a severe disability at the worksite. This model allows for great diversity; however, most positions still tend to be within the service industry. Workers must be paid at least minimum wage or higher, based on job duties. The individual placement model has the greatest potential for providing competitive wages and opportunities for integration.

Enclaves

Enclaves provide community employment in a small-group setting of up to eight workers with the use of permanent on-site supervision by one to two enclave specialists. Work usually occurs in community industries or businesses, which are referred to as host companies. Sub-minimum wages can be paid and are based on prevailing wage and productivity of the worker. This model allows for a higher degree of supervision and support but can be considered more restrictive than the individual placement model.

Mobile Work Crew

A mobile work crew performs specialized services in the community on a contract basis and usually operates out of a van. The majority of contracts are custodial or groundskeeping jobs. Supervision and training are provided by one or two site supervisors for three to eight workers. The rate of pay is based upon worker productivity. Sub-minimum wages are permitted. This model can be an effective employment option for rural communities with little industrial base and it allows for high visibility.

Small Business or Entrepreneurial Model

Operating as an independent business, this model provides employment for several individuals with severe disabilities, dependent upon the size and type of business. Generally, manufacturing, merchandising, or service activities are chosen, and wages range from sub-minimum on up based upon productivity of the employee. A community survey is vital to the success of this model. The small business model can be used for individuals who exhibit severe social or behavioral problems, who are very slow or need intensive training, and who need assistance with self-care.

Standards for Supported Employment

- Supported employment is for persons *not* traditionally eligible for rehabilitation services and who must have ongoing support for the duration of their employment.
- Persons receiving supported employment must have an IWRP reflecting ongoing support from other state, federal, or private programs.
- Employment must average 20 hours per week over the course of that person's normal pay period.
- No more than eight persons with handicapping conditions can work at a given site.
- A worker with a handicapping condition must be able to have regular contact with people who are not disabled, other than personnel providing support services, while on the job site.
- A competitive wage must be paid in accordance with the fair labor standards.
- State vocational rehabilitation agencies can provide funding for supported employment for up to 18 months beginning at the time of placement.
- Individuals, except those chronic mental illness, need on-site job skill training at least twice monthly as part of their ongoing services.
- Off-site support services are not restricted.

These standards originate from PL 99-607, 1987.

Monitoring and Evaluating Supported Employment Placements

Counselors can monitor and evaluate services at several points during the supported employment placement process.

It is essential that a working relationship be established prior to the referral stage to assure that the client receives the maximum benefits from a referral to the service provider. An initial program evaluation can be used in setting guidelines for feedback and communication, referral processes, and opening/closing procedures.

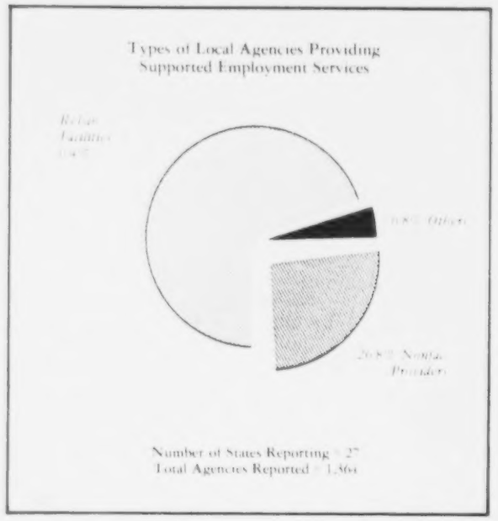
At the referral stage the counselor is instrumental in making sure that only clients who have been unable to obtain or retain employment through traditional methods are referred for supported employment. Counselors will want to secure situational or community-based assessment information in addition to standardized test results. This information is critical in determining what is appropriate for each individual.

During the referral stage the counselor develops the Individualized Written Rehabilitation Program (IWRP) and the counseling plan, which can be of considerable assistance in providing a means for monitoring supported employment services. Items such as the amount and type of data, conferences, progress reports, phone calls, and other communication issues can be clarified in the IWRP.

The counselor should participate in the final job placement decision and should be knowledgeable about the job and the job site that her client will be placed in. A counselor should plan to meet with the service provider about two weeks into the placement in order to gain valuable information about the client's progress, the need for additional training hours, and the competency of the employment specialist. An easy way of keeping up-to-date with a placement is to schedule regular meetings with the provider/employment specialist to coincide with the due date of evaluation reports.

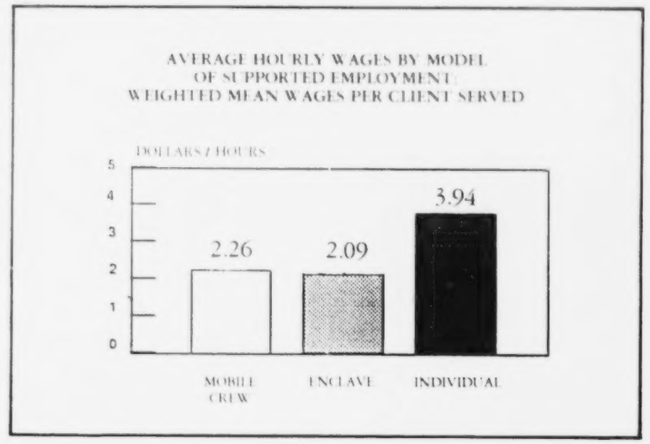
It is necessary for the counselor to be involved in the fading process, in order that appropriate long-term follow along services can be arranged prior to closure. At closure, the counselor may want to evaluate the entire case to assess any additional needs that the client may have. The counselor may be approached at a later date to reopen the case, and a detailed evaluation at closure will assist in making the correct decision.

Emerging Trends in Supported Employment



Recently, the RRTC Research Division surveyed the 27 state supported employment systems change projects to determine emerging trends in the use of supported employment. The following information and charts reflect some of the findings of that survey.

- Rehabilitation facilities appear to be the major providers of supported employment. They are followed by non-facility, non-profit agencies.
- Worker wages continue to show a sub-minimum rate of pay for the group models. The individual placement model, however, continues to offer pay above minimum wage of $3.35.



Advocating for Supported Employment

Because supported employment is considered to be a relatively new rehabilitation method, it is not surprising that many rehabilitation counselors do not have access to it locally. We have included a few tactics that you may want to consider in an attempt to foster enthusiasm for supported employment in your area.

Try the following:

- Encourage participation in supported employment within your own rehabilitation agency.
- Talk with supported employment providers in your state and the rehabilitation counselors who work with these programs.
- Attend seminars on best practices in supported employment, and look for articles, books, and audio-visual products that give detailed information on making supported employment work.
- Meet with a local provider, such as a school, sheltered workshop, hospital, or developmental center, to assess the provider's interest in supported employment.
- Jointly, with the prospective provider agency, begin to assess your community for the feasibility of supported employment services.
- Assist the prospective provider in writing for funding, and at the very minimum, provide your support through letters or phone calls.
- Assist the provider in gaining support from the appropriate long-term funding agency.
- Volunteer to be a member of a supported employment team. The team should include the provider agency, your school system, long-term funding agency, and business leaders.
- Encourage family members and advocates to lobby state agencies and potential service providers for supported employment services.

Paul Wehman Responds to Commonly Asked Supported Employment Questions

Rehabilitation counselors are required to make many critical decisions regarding their day-to-day involvement in the implementation of supported employment. Dr. Paul Wehman, Director of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center at VCU, who is also Professor of Rehabilitation Medicine and author of many vocational rehabilitation-related publications, addresses some of these issues.

1. What should counselors and rehabilitation supervisors know in order to be effective partners in supported employment?

Counselors and rehabilitation supervisors must know the following, related to supported employment: 1) what the models are, and which model holds the most promise for those persons with severe disabilities; 2) how rehabilitation assistive technology and behavior modification technology can be utilized by effective supported employment providers; 3) how to discern which providers are more effective, if not necessarily cost efficient, in delivering results; and 4) the stability of the long-term funding source associated with the vendor.

2. For whom should rehabilitation counselors use supported employment?

Supported employment services, individual or group placement models should be used for clients who have consistently failed at paid employment in the past or who appear to be unable to work independently due to the severity of the disability. Usually, but not always, this means persons with traumatic brain injuries, long histories of chronic mental illness, autism, multiple sensory and or physical handicaps, and moderate, severe, or profound levels of mental retardation. Supported employment should not be used as a substitute for effective job placement and counseling by the rehabilitation counselor. It should be used when these less intensive strategies do not work.

3. What set of decision-making rules or criteria should counselors utilize in determining whether supported employment is an appropriate choice for a client?

Several rules or criteria may include: 1) Does the client need long term, intermittent, or daily support in order to get a job and keep a job? 2) Will the client respond to the training provided by the supported employment provider and *eventually* be a reasonably productive employee? 3) What is the quality and quantity of supported employment opportunities (vendors) in the local community from which to select? 4) Does the client and the family want supported employment assistance?

4. How much time, money, and effort should a counselor invest in one individual for supported employment?

The time, money, and effort which can and should be invested in a potential supported employment client is the same as for any client who has difficulties--whether supported employment was the option of choice or not. There are two critical issues which need to be resolved to the satisfaction of the counselor. First, is the client committee to working and is the client trying to make the job work? And second, can a counselor see progress being made even if the progress is small? If the answer to both issues is affirmative, then continued effort should probably be provided, even if this means seeking joint funding from other agencies.

Resources for Further Information

Books

Rubin, S.E., & Rubin N.M. (Eds.) (1988). *Contemporary challenges to the rehabilitation counseling professions.* Baltimore: Paul Brookes Publishing Co.

Wehman, P., & Moon, M.S. (Eds.) (1988). *Vocational rehabilitation and supported employment.* Baltimore: Paul Brookes Publishing Co.

Monographs

Moon, M.S., Goodall, P., Barcus, M., & Brooke, V. (Eds.) (1986). *The supported work model of competitive employment for citizens with severe handicaps: A guide for job trainers* (National Institute of Handicapped Research Grant No. G008301124). Richmond, VA: Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center.

Wehman, P., Kregel, J., & Shafer, M.S. (Eds.) (1989). *Emerging trends in the national supported employment initiative: A preliminary analysis of twenty-seven states* (National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research Grant No. H133B80052). Richmond, VA: Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center.

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Kregel, J., Hill, M., & Banks, P.D. (1988). Analysis of employment specialist intervention time in supported competitive employment. *American Journal of Mental Retardation, 93*(2), 200–208.

What Type of Information Do You Need to Help You Implement Supported Employment with Your Clients?

The RRTC would like your input on potential training seminars and materials that could be developed for rehabilitation counselors. Please check the following items as they apply to you.

I would find the following helpful:

____ 1. Formal training in supported employment.

____ 2. One- to two-day workshops in supported employment.

____ 3. Rehabilitation counselor guide to using supported employment.

____ 4. Specific training in the following areas. (Please circle all that apply).
- a. Selecting a vendor
- b. Determining the amount of time necessary for success.
- c. Determining the amount of money necessary.
- d. Establishing a working relationship with other team members.
- e. Determining the best client model match.

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"Improving the Employability of Citizens Who Are Mentally Retarded"

Virginia Commonwealth University
Rehabilitation Research and Training Center

The VCU-RRTC was re-funded in 1988 by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research to conduct research and training for the next five years on supported employment for citizens with developmental and other severe disabilities. For further information on these projects or other research and training activities conducted at the VCU-RRTC, call (804) 367-1851 or write to 1314 West Main Street, Richmond, VA 23284-0001.

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